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Global Area Studies with Special Reference to the Malay or Maritime World

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I Introduction

This essay explores recent frontiers in area studies, especially as conducted in Japan, by focussing on Southeast Asian studies.

First, the various trends of endeavor in area studies are viewed in terms of the disciplinary commitment that scholars express or feel. The spectrum of commitment itself shows the historical trajectory of area studies, from foreign studies to multidisciplinary area studies, to transdisciplinary area studies. It is apparent that a new concept of area studies is emerging, and the background of this development will be briefly reviewed.

Second, the concept of unit-world as a substitute for area is discussed, together with sociocultural ecodynamics as a methodology for transdisciplinary area studies.

The third section examines the maritime world or Malay world as a case of a unit-world.

In conclusion, it will be argued that this kind of area studies, or global area studies, could provide a new paradigm for the twenty-first century that goes beyond nation-state or ethnicity.

II Variegated Commitment to Area Studies

Area studies in the Japanese context is best seen in terms of a spectrum that covers many different intellectual enterprises. One criterion for distinguishing differences in area studies is scholars' commitment to area studies itself according to their degree of departure from a disciplinary perspective. Fig. 1 shows the relationship of area studies and disciplines in terms of the commitment of scholars engaged in research.

At one extreme of the scale, there are generalists or theorists who believe in disciplinary universalism, and who hold academic career positions in established disciplines. They think that area studies per se is not very relevant or crucial to their

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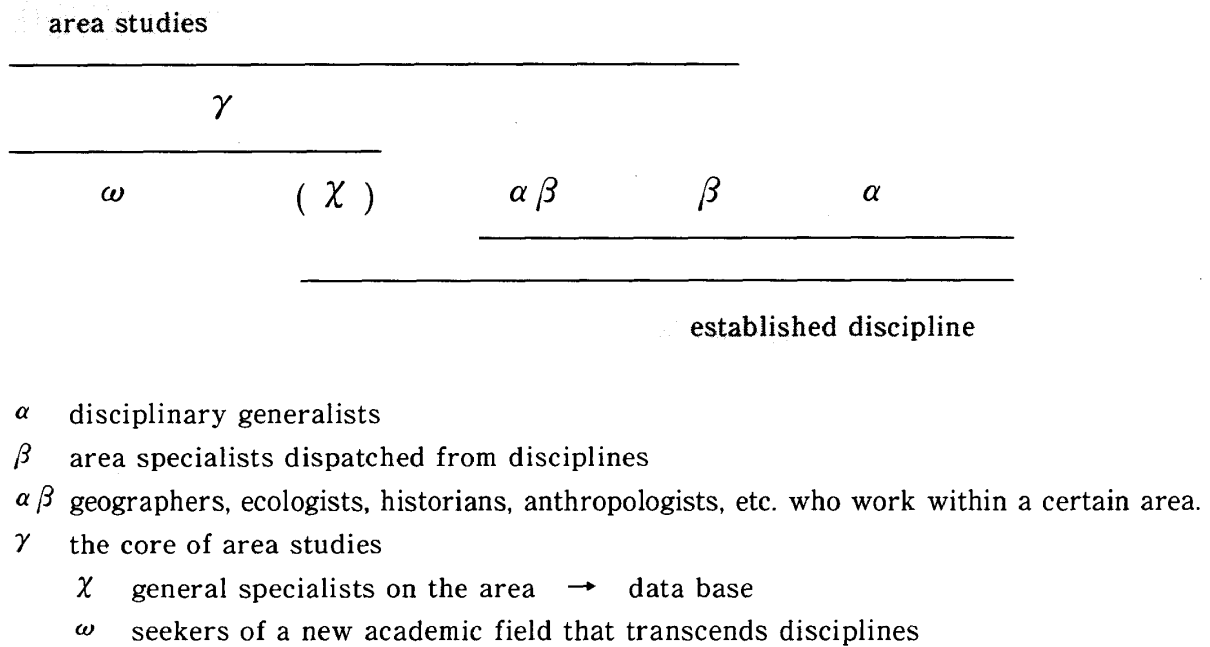


Fig. 1 The Spectrum of Commitment to Area Studies

theories. Only a refined discipline, whatever it may be, has utmost importance for them. Category α in the diagram indicates their position.

Category β in the diagram consists of area specialists who vigorously pursue knowledge on their chosen area but always return to their discipline when they deem it necessary. The nominal area specialist in category β is a scientist, well trained in a discipline, who may participate in area studies in order to obtain necessary data. Such researchers are ready to return to their discipline when they have the chance to be regarded as a "full" member of the discipline, and they seek legitimacy within their own discipline. However extensive their training in language or their in-country experience may be, their basic reference point is the discipline in which they reside, and their long-term tendency is toward increasing disciplinary specialization. Their aim is to improve themselves in their discipline and to return to the mainstream of scholarship after they have achieved a certain eminence in area studies. Area studies for them is a disciplinary enterprise with the flavor of foreign or comparative study.

It is argued from disciplinary perspectives that the heart of area studies, statistically speaking, lies in just four disciplines in the United States [Lambert 1991: 188]. These are language and literature, history, political science, and anthropology. These may, together, be able to create "a kind of historically informed political anthropology, using materials in the local language" [*ibid.*: 192], but they may not be area studies in a real sense. Category $\alpha\beta$ is a special one of people who, willingly or unwillingly, have to conduct research in local contexts, such as geography, ecology or international studies, in addition to the above four disciplines.

Category γ consists of serious area specialists who regard themselves as constituting the core of area studies and devote all or a substantial portion of their professional careers to area studies. This is divided into two sub-categories, χ and ω . Sub-category χ consists of so-called "area specialists" who are interested in everything that concerns the area. They master a substantial amount of factual knowledge on a wide range of topics relevant to the area. Their knowledge could form a general knowledge base or data base for the area. Yet their methods derive from a discipline, and the data collected are bound for or contained within the framework of a discipline.

Sub-category ω is quite different from all of the others in that its members try to transcend established disciplines in one way or another. Transcendence could be mere rhetoric, but it provides a strong inspiration for them. Formerly, being outside of the established disciplines, they were neglected or considered not to be scientific researchers; and often they were confused with members of χ , whose studies sometimes tended toward dilettantism or exoticism. But the recent maturity and sophistication of area studies has brought forward the intellectual possibility of a form of new area studies free from strategic considerations of state and separate from established disciplines. Proponents of ω claim that theirs is more than a multidisciplinary academic field, producing more than "raw materials" for generalists. They even point out that "many aspect of the discipline are not universal but in reality represent hidden area studies" [*ibid.*: 179] of the country where the discipline is practiced. Commitment to ω means, in a sense, to seek for a breakthrough by means of area studies in the midst of a kind of stagnation in the social sciences.

Being potentially an experiment, however, area studies in this vein is in turn required to present images about its own methods, concepts, or epistemology to reconstruct the edifices of disciplinary theory from the bottom up. This may be parallel to the anthropological faith of "experimental positivism": the facticity of experience outweighs the anticipations of theory [Fardon 1990: 3]. If we use a metaphor of anthropological ethnographies, the contention of area studies is that ethnographies on Southeast Asia are more homogeneously regionalized than the differences in ethnographic accounts caused by theoretical stances or by disciplines other than anthropology.

The spectrum from α to ω has often been discussed in terms of a confrontation between discipline and area studies, e.g., *Political Science and Area Studies: Rivals or Partners?* ed. by Lucian W. Pye [1975]. I would not argue that all area studies should be in the train of ω . Rather I agree that, in the coming decade, various endeavors should develop different perspectives of area studies. Nonetheless, the core of area studies, if we wish to call it area studies at all, should be formed in the mold of ω . With the accumulation of works in area studies, it is time to emphasize the transdisciplinary aspect of area studies.

Historically speaking, all disciplines can be considered to have originated to some extent from a kind of area studies. "It may even be contended that political science and

perhaps other social sciences were until very recently little more than parochial studies of an area limited to western Europe and the United States, masquerading under a universal rubric" [Wood 1968: 401]. Because this historical genesis of disciplines out of area studies was relatively unnoticed, area studies was generally started or conceived as foreign studies. Of course, disciplines at home are guidelines for such foreign studies. Researchers observed things foreign from their own perspectives. Exotic subject matters induced dilettantism and exoticism. This stage of area studies showed humanistic orientations toward either language, literature or history.

After World War II, area studies was developed as a kind of strategic studies of foreign countries, involving collaboration and group research by scholars with various disciplinary backgrounds. These may be called multidisciplinary area studies. At that time, social scientists engaging in area studies felt acutely the confrontation between discipline and area specialization, since they were considered inferior to general theorists. One solution was to find a compromise position [Pye 1975]. But this position was tenuous and did not much help area specialists, because disciplinary generalizations eventually won over area specialization in the framework of disciplines, especially in the United States. The lack of funds to support area programs also invited stagnation of area studies. It should be pointed out, however, the blurring of disciplines has subsequently become an academic fashion or trend in the United States, not necessarily in area studies.

In contrast to the United States, the promotion of area studies as a transdisciplinary project has emerged in Southeast Asian studies in Japan. As pointed out above, transdisciplinary area studies is trying to develop its own field of study as one which cannot be covered by established disciplines.

III Conceptual and Methodological Orientation

The Concept of Unit-World

Lambert characterizes area studies as nondisciplinary endeavor since topics often fall in domains where the conceptual and methodological apparatus of particular disciplines is least relevant [1991: 191]. But this assumes that "the core of area studies in the social sciences lies in the nontechnical, frequently nondisciplinary end of the discipline" [*ibid.*: 192]. We would contend that, whatever area studies may be, it is free from, or transcends, the limits of discipline.

The first task is to ascertain a new meaning for the concept of area. In claiming that we engage in area studies not as a disciplinary specialist but an area specialist per se, we assert the validity of "area" as a meaningful frame for analysis. Otherwise we need not call our endeavors "area studies." This stance can be formulated as a relativism committed to the idea of uniqueness of area, without claiming that there is a consensus about the idea of definite uniqueness. Following Gellner's rationalist fundamentalism [1992], we may call this faith "relativistic fundamentalism."

The term area is commonly used as the most inclusive generic term for a portion of the earth's surface. It is conceived of as any arbitrarily, or even randomly, chosen segment of the earth's surface, in contrast to "place," "region," or "space," with no specified character other than internal continuity and contiguity among its sub-areas. But in "area studies" the term implies in practice a certain part of the world, often one country or state, where interdisciplinary programs of training or research have been carried out. Although the area presumably has some degree of internal cultural, economic, or political homogeneity, the term "region" has not been widely used in place of "area," partly because a region is regarded as a special kind of area that often evolves its own "regionalism" [Ginsburg 1968: 398ff.].

It is apparent that the term "area" situates itself between "space," as a boundless three-dimensional extent, and "region," which has a distinctive homology. The concept of area is one of an unboundable but distinctive entity. It is not purely an ontological entity, nor a physical space, but an epistemological or relational entity. Boundaries are produced out of relationships. I propose to call this area a "unit-world," following Takaya [1993]. "World" insinuates the universe or all that exists. Its connotation is wholeness, completeness, everythingness, however relativistic or protean it may be. The English word "world" derives from a Germanic root meaning "age." The Chinese *shi-jie* (世界), which Japanese has also adopted, has the same components of the time and state of human existence. It is not simply a physical, spatial concept, but a spatial entity with sedimented temporality or genidentity. The spatial entity is an areal unit with a relativistic wholeness, which in actuality man has to demarcate out of the chains of beings.

An aerial unit can be constituted as one of several concentric layers of a circle or class: a domicile place, a community, a region, a state, a geographical area, a continent, the earth. Or it can be demarcated by applying a certain denominator for division, for example, geographic and ecological features or cultural traits. Classification, except by genealogy or descent, could involve either unidimensional clear-cut division by index or typological division by family-resemblance. The unit-world is not itself a space: it is demarcated by an ideal-typical model applicable to the total phenomena in the area.

There is no consensus about how to demarcate unit-worlds on the earth or even in Southeast Asia. Furukawa [1991], although not himself admitting them as unit-worlds, divides Southeast Asia into ten ecological facets from the point of view of climate, vegetation, geology and soil: (I) Continental montane facet; (II) Continental plateau facet; (III) Delta facet; (IV) Archipelagic wet-zone facet; (V) Archipelagic wetland facet; (VI) Sumatra volcano facet; (VII) Java volcano facet; (VIII) Southern Wallacea facet; (IX) Northern Wallacea facet; and (X) Australian-New Guinean facet (Fig. 2).

Takaya [1985] also maps ecological areas in Southeast Asia in a similar manner to Furukawa, adding the factors of landuse and type of agriculture: (1) Continental mountainous area; (2) Plateau area; (3) Deltaic area; (4) Western archipelagic wet-zone area; (5) Eastern archipelagic wet-zone area; (6) Java area; (7) Nusa Tenggara area; (8)

Philippine area; and (9) Irian Jaya area (Fig. 3).

Based on these ecological divisions, Takaya [1993] proposed four unit-worlds in Southeast Asia. (1) Southeast Asian continental mountainous world; (2) Thai-deltaic world; (3) Javanese world; and (4) Maritime Southeast Asian world (Fig. 4). He characterizes these unit-worlds by means of ecological-environmental substrate and way of life, livelihood and world view which, have been affected by outer civilizations. The unit-world of Takaya is, in a sense, the "imagined world" of Benedict Anderson.

Yano [1991], a political scientist, presents seven typologies for Southeast Asian polities: (1) Lucidophyllos-forest cultural area; (2) Dry country (Thattadesa) space; (3) Continental riverine wet-zone space; (4) Large-river deltaic space; (5) Malay world; (6) Javanese world; and (7) Maritime urban space. He takes into consideration ecological differences which supposedly resulted in the respective types of political domination or polities.

For the continental part of Southeast Asia there are few discrepancies between the classifications: those based on ecological differences of mountain, plateau, and delta corresponds with the sociocultural typologies. In the archipelago, however, the classifications are at variance, except for Java, to which everybody confers the particular

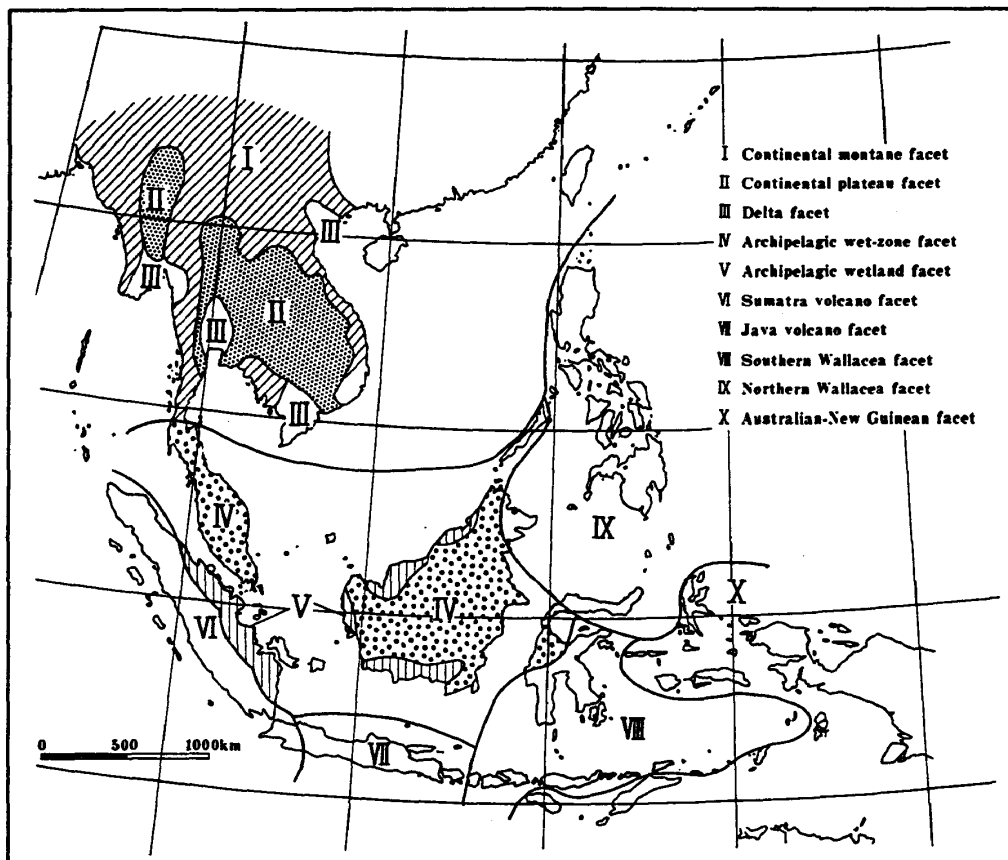


Fig. 2 Ecological-Environmental Facets in Southeast Asia
Source: [Furukawa 1990]

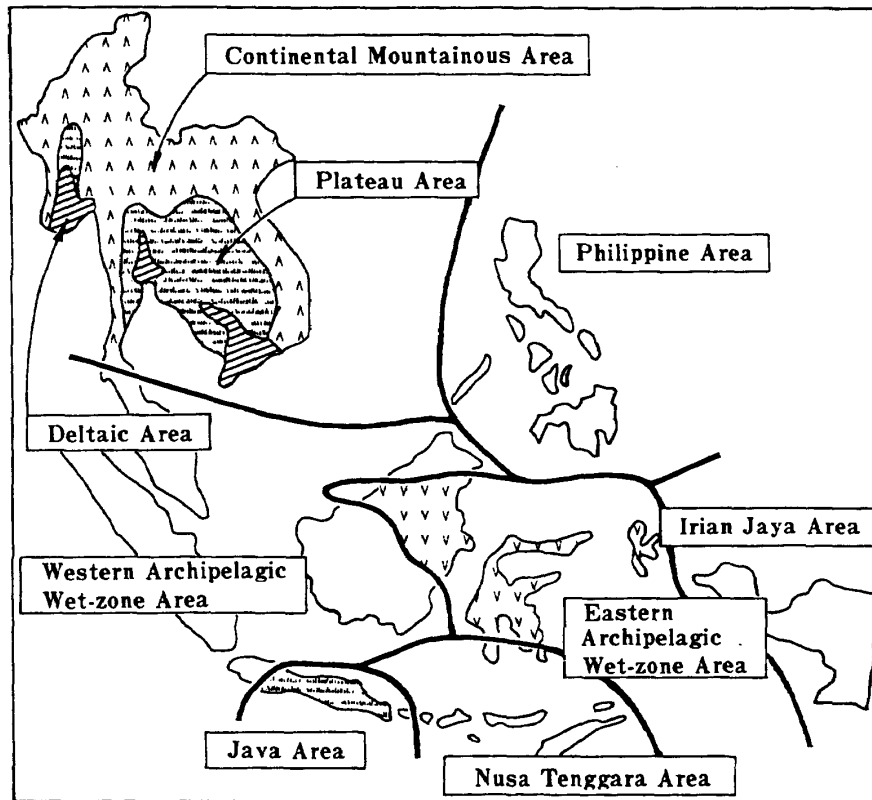


Fig. 3 Ecological Divisions by Land Use in Southeast Asia
Source: [Takaya 1985]

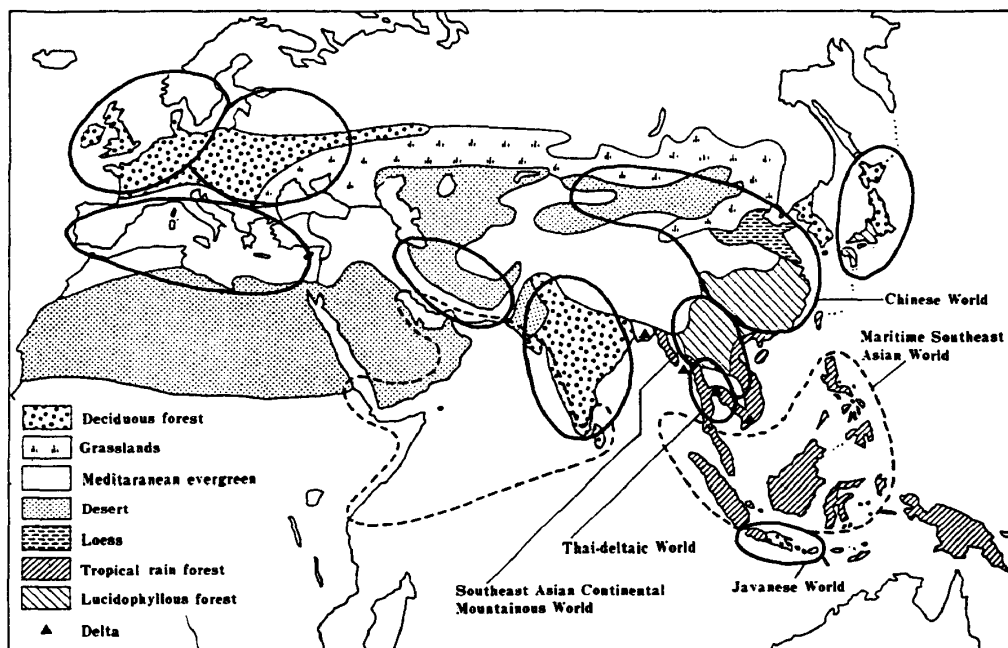


Fig. 4 Unit-Worlds: Some Examples
Source: [Takaya 1993]

status of a world. This discrepancy in the insulinde may derive from a lack of accordance with definite denominators, ecological or sociocultural. Before I present a more plausible unit-world than those mentioned above, it is appropriate to clarify what constitutes the unit-world.

Sociocultural Ecodynamics

The unit-world consists of three domains: ecological, social and cultural (Fig. 5). The ecodynamics of these three domains sustains them as a unit-world. Power, energy or forces emitted from three domains hold the world together.

ECOLOGICAL production adaptation identity	HABITAT landscape	(1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a climate, fauna, flora b geographic position, 風水 c resources, water, land
	TECHNOLOGY techniques	(2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a tool-making b food acquisition, production c transportation,
	HUMAN NATURE agency	(3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a physique, heritage, gender, diseases b population c violence, war d habitus, ethnicity
SOCIAL coercion control	INSTITUTIONS allocation of power role collectivity	(4) socialization institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a family, community b education c social welfare
		(5) remote-control institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a power, hierarchy, bureaucracy, surveillance b military power c capital, labor, market, trade, division of labor d industrialism
		(6) parasite institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a city b colonialism, plantation
		(7) communitas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a religious institution b associations, social movements, resistance c leisure, play, amusement
CULTURAL cognition explanation	SYMBOLS form meaning use function	(8) exchange symbols: language, signs, money	
		(9) marshaling symbols: world view, ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a ritual, magic, myth b value, norms, ethics c law d science
		(10) representation symbols:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> art in time art in space art in space and time art in life
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> material c. ideational c. cognitive s. expressive s. evaluative s. consistency contradiction 		

Fig. 5 Constituent Domains of the Unit-World

The unit-world is primordially definable in terms of ecological environment, with sociocultural forces to modify it. The ecological environment is composed of not only physical environments (habitat, landscape) but also technological products and human agency. Human nature is part of the ecological environment and one of the agents, not the sole agent, in the environment that work on the unit-world.

As indicators of the social domain, we take social institutions for allocation of power, which are encoded in role and collectivity. Socialization institutions, such as family, community, education systems, or even social welfare for delinquents, indoctrinate members to adapt to social forces. Remote-control institutions are what are called political and economic systems, but the emphasis is on indirect appropriation and manipulation. Since urban problems and colonialism are crucial in considering Southeast Asian situations, parasite institutions are separated from the remote-control institutions. The *communitas* is usually regarded an anti-structure, and thus not a social institution. But the *communitas* structured differently from a normative structure should be taken into consideration in the analysis of the social domain.

The cultural domain is often named as a system of meaning. Here we take up symbols as vehicles of meaning in order to concretize analysis. This domain, like the other domains, can be conceived in various ways. Here we may divide it into three: symbols or mediums used in exchange or for communication, like language, signs, money, etc.; marshaling symbols, which command people's perception, like world view, ideology, science, etc.; and symbols for expression or representation, like various arts.

This trichotomy is similar to Felix Guattari's three ecologies or ecosophies [Guattari 1989]: environmental, social, and subjective or mental ecosophies. In our scheme, the subjectivity of Guattari is included in the concepts of human nature or agency in the ecological domain. Trichotomies have also been proposed by others: Jürgen Habermas' objective, social, and subjective worlds [Habermas 1981]; or Karl Popper's physical, social, and mental worlds [Popper 1979]. Kenneth Boulding [1985], in *The World as a Total System*, classifies the universe into three: a physical system, a biological system and a social system. These he further subdivides, identifying the world as a physical system, the world as a biological system, the world as a social system, the world as an economical system, the world as a political system, the world as a communication system, and the world as an evaluative system. In Talcott Parsons' theory of action [Parsons 1966], his cultural system and social system are almost equivalent to our scheme, but the ecological domain covers a part of his personality system, behavioral organism and physical-organic environment.

Our thinking in Fig. 5 is quite eclectic, but more ecological in its broadest sense. We are interested in the interactions, selection, and succession of unit-worlds. And these require dynamics or ecodynamics to explain them (Fig. 6). There is a hierarchy of contexts within contexts. At the core there is the *habitus* defined by body, mind, and language (Fig. 6a). Then comes the interrelationship of culture, social relations, and *habitus* restrained in

the ecological environment (Fig. 6b). In the broader context, descent with modification may transform the unit-world through the uncoupling of system and life-world à la Habermas, differentiation and hypertrophy of some parts of the domains, reception of other civilizations, globalization, and so on (Fig. 6c). Based on the sociocultural ecodynamics, a historical structure emerges out of the local history of the unit-world (Fig. 6d).

Fig. 6a Habitus

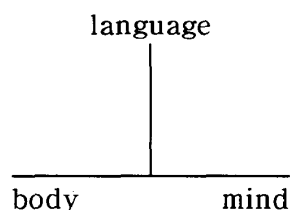


Fig. 6b Interrelationship in sociocultural ecodynamics

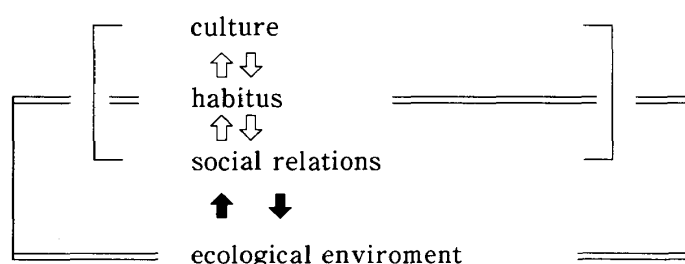
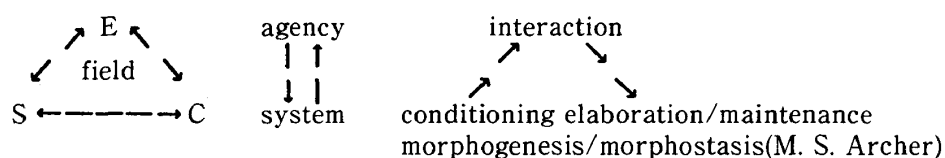


Fig. 6c Transformation



pressure from the outside, catastrophe, war, conflict



globalization + cognitive minority
recipency of other civilizations



selection → descent with modification



uncoupling of system and life-world
differentiation and hypertrophy in
domains E, S, C

$$E \subset C \Leftrightarrow S \subset E \\ S \subseteq E \subseteq C$$

⇒ transformation
in $\Sigma [E, S, C]$

Fig. 6 Sociocultural Ecodynamics

Fig. 6d Historical structure: axes, phases, epochs

[Prepositions]

- ① The degree of collectivity or solidarity depends on centrality and the quality of the network of institutions and symbols.
- ② There are centers, which may be strong or weak, single or multiple, which determine the strength of the framework of collectivity to a certain extent.
- ③ Centrality and network undergo historical changes.

[The case of Java] (cf. Fig. 5)

prehistory		axis of ➡ concentric cosmos	axis of ➡ trade network	axis of ➡ westernization	21c
E (1)		a	b	c	
(2)	Hunting/Gathering	Agraria		Industria (E. Gellner)	
(3)	interpersonalism	cosmocentric	gede/cilik	alus/kasar	
S		(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
C		(9)	(10)	(8)	(9)
(9)		a	b	c	d
	network	~ centrality	~ network	~ centrality	~

Trois « nebuleuses » socio-culturelles (Denys Lombart)

- ① la protohistoire
- ① l'héritage des royaumes concentriques
indianization, hierarchy, wet rice cultivation, harmony,
sedentarism/mobility
- ② les réseaux asiatiques
Islam, China, the sea
fanaticism/tolerance
- ③ les limites de l'occidentalisation
westernization, colonization
conversion/rejection

Fig. 6 — Continued

Methodology

To avoid falling into predisciplinary or propaedeutic area studies, a methodology is required. It should be a grounded theory in the sense of Glaser and Strauss [1967] or a critical (disciplined configurative) analysis as proposed by Chalmers Johnson [in Pye 1975: 93]. We could start by applying or borrowing disciplinary methods. But the following methods should have central parts in chorographic but theory-producing endeavors: fieldwork [Maeda 1993], case study [Ragin and Becker 1992; Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg 1991], network analysis [Scott 1991; Wellman and Berkowitz 1988; Turner 1988], and system analysis, which consists of analysis of budget, context and content. Takaya [1993] suggests a landscape approach to grasp a unit ecologically and integrally,

but this requires essentially intuitive, perspectival constructs based on a chorographic and descriptive technique.

IV The Maritime or Malay World

In contrast to the ecological sub-divisions of Southeast Asia, Takaya [1993] proposes one unit-world for China (see Fig. 4), where he recognizes four quite different ecological types: loess land, grassy plain, desert and oasis, and forest. But China has had particular civilizational mechanisms to integrate all of the ecological areas into one set. One of the mechanisms is, according to him, Confucianism. China is a centric society with a definite frame of boundaries, which was roughly defined during the Qin dynasty.

It is true that Southeast Asia as a whole does not have a systemic integrity like China. In that sense it may be termed as a network society or an aggregation of network societies. But we would argue that Southeast Asia is also a unit-world, especially the maritime Southeast Asia and its periphery. This is not to claim that there is an integral force in Southeast Asia. It is not a centric kind of unit-world. Implicit organizing principles chain together various sub-units by the analogy of family resemblance, and as a whole they can be treated as a unit. Several recent endeavors to demarcate boundaries of maritime networks include those of Warren [1981], Lombart [1990] and Yajima [1993].

To further the discussion, it is useful to introduce the analogy of the subject and the predicate in order to demarcate boundaries. We can distinguish two kinds of sentence formation in language. One is a sentence pattern which is determined by its subject. If the subject is defined, its predicate follows the rule of the subject in terms of voice, mood, gender, number and so on. The subject controls the whole sentence. Sentence formation is governed by what may be termed principle of subjective logic. On the other hand, in some languages, a subject is not necessarily required, and the predicate can be treated as a full sentence. Or, by the accumulation of predicates, the unmentioned subject may be implicitly understood. The predicate determines the subject, if necessary. The logic behind this is a predicative one.

China, a centric society, follows a subjective logic. Southeast Asia, a network society, sticks to a predicative logic. This difference in logic prevented Takaya from taking Southeast Asia as a unit-world. I gather that he sought different typologies in accordance with differences in objects: one in an ideal-typical approach and another in a descriptive way.

The boundary of the Southeast Asian unit-world is protean, but its prototype can be sought in the maritime world, which is a dominant and particular ecological feature of Southeast Asia. In this world, tropical rainforest and the sea restrain the sociocultural ecodynamics. The restraints affect selection of habitat, subsistence, occupation, and way of life in general, so that a certain type of habitus emerges. As a forest-edge animal, man selected the seashore or strand area as his protohabitat or ecological niche, relying heavily

on fishing, hunting, gathering, shifting cultivation, or exchange and trade.

Social relations consists of radical pairing or dyadic equilibrium [Maeda 1975], emphasizing a pair relationship in every activity to cope with the harsh environment for man and forming not a rigid group with strict membership but a fuzzy, flexible circle of people [see Fiske 1991 for elementary forms of human relations]. The limits and restricted locations of resources forced people always to move around to seek resources in gathering, hunting, and fishing and to barter and trade forest or marine products for necessities. Even agricultural activities required shifting systems of cultivation. Dispersion of people was normative and commoditization for exchange was a necessity.

In these circumstances, it was difficult for systemic domination over a large territory to appear, and if it did it was ephemeral. Rather, charismatic leadership fitted the diasporic situation with ample supplies of water, mobile population, and resources.

Thus the prototype of maritime Southeast Asia can be summarized as consisting of the diasporic type of settlement, commoditization or commercialization, and the network type of social relations which bonded together aggregations of people mostly by means of charismatic leadership [Maeda 1989; 1993]. This could be the legacy of the proto-Austronesian culture [see Solheim 1988].

Within this category of the unit-world we can include insular Southeast Asia as well as riverine, deltaic and coastal regions of continental Southeast Asia. The core or prototype of the maritime world is the Malay world, not in an ethnic sense but in a wider linguistic sense comprising the Malayo-Polynesian family, as well as in the sense of coastal people, including Thais and others who live in the deltaic plain. We gather that the Javanese world, which is distinguished from the Malay world by specialists, is a particularly differentiated, diversified or derivative case of the Malay world.

V Towards the Twenty-First Century

It is arguable what kind of society would be ideal in the coming world of modern global societies. Appaduri [1990] proposed an elementary framework of five dimensions to explore global cultural flow in the disjunctive order of today's global interactions: ethnoscaples, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes.

The common suffix *-scape* is used "to indicate first of all that these are not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" [*ibid.*: 296]. This reasoning for the use of *-scape* seems convincing: these landscapes can offer only an analytical tool but they may not be enough to constitute an "imagined world," so that they become an appropriate agency in place of ethnos, nation-state, or regionalism.

Our argument is that a centric society with a strong center and a periphery could be reevaluated in terms of a network society with predicative logic in its constitution. In this

sense, the prototype of the maritime or Malay world as a unit-world could offer an alternative paradigm for the global world.

A critical point is the coexistence of strong, centric unit-worlds and weak, vinculum unit-worlds. We hope that we can utilize the concepts of unit-world and global area studies to bring this coexistence to reality in the twenty-first century.

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